

MEMORANDUM FOR: All NOAA Employees

FROM: R. J. Dominic
Director/Comptroller, Finance Office

SUBJECT: Travel Advisory 02-3 (Foreign Travel Processing Requirements)

The purpose of this advisory is to remind travelers of the requirements for processing foreign travel. Currently, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) processes all NMFS foreign travel packages and the NOAA Travel Office (NTO) processes all other foreign travel packages.

Complete foreign travel packages must be submitted for processing. A complete foreign travel package consists of an approved travel order with number assigned by the Line/Staff Office, and a signed copy of the "Foreign Defensive Travel Briefing Acknowledgment Statement" available at <http://www.ofa.noaa.gov/~finance>, Chapter 306-7. The employee's grade, date of birth, office contact name, and phone number must be annotated in the "Remarks" section of the travel order. Depending on country requirements, a complete foreign travel package could also include passport applications, passports, photos, visa applications, and letters of invitation. Incomplete foreign travel packages will be returned, and could delay or prevent travel.

To ensure a Government employee's safety while traveling abroad, country clearance cables, required for all countries, **MUST** be processed by your Line/Staff Office International Affairs Office. Country clearance cables are used within the foreign diplomatic network to notify Department of State officials in Washington, D.C., and embassy and post officers abroad, of a traveler's presence in a foreign country. For travelers who have received country clearance, Department of State will provide assistance in situations including, but not limited to, political unrest, health emergencies, and crime.

The NTO and NMFS must receive foreign travel packages that do not require visas or passports 4 weeks before the start of travel. Additional time is required to process foreign travel packages that require visas and passports. Lead-time requirements for processing visas and passports are dictated by the embassies and Department of State, and have changed substantially since the terrorist attack September 11, 2001. Additional lead-time to process a visa is 6 to 7 working days for most countries. An additional 15 days lead-time is required to obtain a visa for China, Russia and Vietnam. An additional 2 months lead-time is required to obtain a visa for Cuba. Current visa applications may be obtained at the NTO and NMFS. Completed visa applications must accompany foreign travel packages when submitted for processing. A visa cannot be obtained without an official passport. Most countries require that the passport be valid at least 6 months or longer beyond the dates of travel.

The Department of State requires 4 to 6 weeks lead-time to process applications for official passports. Passport applications submitted with less than 4 weeks lead-time must include an emergency expedite letter addressed to Ms. Battie Stewart, Chief, Official Travel. Passport applications, DS-82, are available at <http://www.travel.state.gov>. Please read the instructions carefully. Also, new requirements for passport photos can be found at <http://www.ofa.noaa.gov/~finance/travel>.

Department of State security requirements dictate that upon completion of foreign travel, all official passports must be returned to the NTO for safekeeping in the official passport repository. Offices that have blanket travel or frequent foreign travel may retain official passports in a locked safe. **Official passports must never be kept at home.**

Upon leaving Government services, all valid or expired official passports **MUST** be returned to the NTO for cancellation. Employees who wish to retain their official passport as a souvenir must return their official passport with a note to do so to the NTO. The NTO will forward the passport to the Department of State for cancellation. After cancellation, the official passport will be returned to the traveler. **Official passports are the property of the Government, and are not the personal property of the traveler.**

For verification of visa requirements or questions concerning this advisory, please contact Ruth Wagerman of the NTO on (301) 413-3060 ext. 135 or JoAnna Grable of NMFS on (301) 713-0155.